DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 383 966 CG 026 126

AUTHOR	Zill, Nicholas; Nolin, Mary Jo
TITLE	School Learning Environments as Reported by Teachers, Parents, and Students.
PUB DATE	Oct 94
NOTE	44p.; Paper presented at the "Safe Schools, Safe Students: A Collaborative Approach to Achieving Safe, Disciplined and Drug-Free Schools Conducive to Learning" Conference (Washington, DC, October 28-29, 1994).
PUB TYPE	Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adolescents; Children; *Educational Environment; Elementary Secondary Education; *Family School Relationship; *Parent Child Relationship; *Parent Participation; Parent School Relationship; Peer Groups; *Peer Influence; Perception; *Values
IDENTIFIERS	*National Household Education Survey

ABSTRACT

American parents who are trying to rear their children in responsible ways do so in the face of peer influences that may be at odds with the parents' values. This report examines some of the findings of the 1993 National Household Education Survey (NHES) to show how families and students' peers sometimes work at cross-purposes. Specifically addressed here are views on health-related behaviors, educational attainment and achievement, and conduct in school. Since many educators believe that children are more likely to succeed in school when children's parents are involved in school activities, degrees of parent involvement are examined first. Parent involvement was measured in accordance with a child's grade level and age, family characteristics, comparative involvement in public and private schools, and the relationship to student achievement and behavior. Examined next are reports of teachers, parents, and students on the school environment. Addressed here are conditions that interfere with teaching and learning, unlawful behavior at school, harm or harassment at school, strategies to avoid harm at school, school discipline policies, and alcohol and drug education. Sixteen figures offer graphs depicting parents' and students' opinions on various topics and related data. Contains a list of four related reports released by the National Center for Education Statistics. (RJM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 383 966

School Learning Environments as Reported by Teachers, Parents, and Students

by

Nicholas Zill, Westat, Inc.

Mary Jo Nolin, Westat, Inc.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CG026126

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

N. Zill

M.J. Nolin

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Family Goals vs. Peer Influences

American parents who are trying to rear their children in responsible ways do so in the face of peer influences that are sometimes at odds with the goals parents are trying to achieve. The 1993 National Household Education Survey (NHES), a survey sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics of the U.S. Department of Education, provides several examples of the ways in which families and peers may work at cross-purposes. Two of the examples have to do with health-related behavior, one with striving for academic excellence, and one with conduct in school.

Smoking and Drinking

- In the 1993 NHES, parents with children in grades 6-12, 98 percent of the parents said no, it was not all right for their children to smoke cigarettes; 96 percent said the same about their children drinking alcoholic beverages.

- In the same survey, 63 percent of U.S. high school students said their friends at school thought it all right to smoke cigarettes or chew tobacco; 62 percent said their friends thought it all right to drink beer, wine coolers, or liquor.

- Eighty-two percent of high school students said it was "very easy" or "fairly easy" to get cigarettes or tobacco at school; 42 percent said it was easy to get beer or wine there.

- Students from more affluent and educated families were actually *more* likely to say they had access to cigarettes or alcohol at school than students from families with more modest means.

- Students in private schools were less likely to report that they had easy access to cigarettes and alcohol at school than students in public schools.

Educational Attainment—Expectations and Realities

- In the 1993 NHES, 98 percent of students in grades 6-12 were expected by their parents to graduate from high school; 88 percent were expected to attend college; and 74 percent, to graduate from college.

- The current realities are that 87 percent of students graduate from high school; 49 percent attend college; and 23 percent graduate from college.

Peer Support for Achievement and Good Conduct

- Only 38 percent of U.S. students in grades 6-12 said their friends at school thought it very important to work hard for good grades.

- Only 30 percent said their friends at school thought it very important to behave properly in class.

- More than a third thought that an atmosphere of mutual respect between teachers and students did *not* exist at their schools.

- Asian-American students were more likely than other students to report that their friends *did* support a diligent approach to school work. African-American students were less likely than other students to report that an atmosphere of mutual respect between teachers and students existed at their schools.

- Students in private schools were more likely than public school students to say that their friends supported hard work for good grades and that an atmosphere of mutual respect existed at their schools. However, private school students were no more likely to report peer approval of good behavior at school.

Parent Involvement

Many educators believe that children are more likely to do well in school if their parents are involved in school activities than if the parents are uninvolved. It is not that having a parent attend PTA meetings leads directly to higher test scores or better conduct marks for the child. Rather, parent participation in school activities is likely to mean closer parental monitoring of what is happening in the school in general and in the child's classroom in particular. This can lead to better coordination of teacher and parent efforts, to greater personal attention for the child from the teacher, and to problems being detected and corrective action being taken before difficulties become too serious. The fact that the parent bothers to get involved communicates to the child that he or she considers school important. In addition, parental participation in organized school activities is usually an indication that the parent provides other forms of encouragement and support for the learning process outside of schoo'

In the 1993 NHES, parent involvement was measured by asking parents of students in grades 3 through 12 whether they attended PTA meetings; went to school plays, sports events, or science fairs; or acted as volunteers or served on committees at school. Parents who had done none or only one of these things were categorized as displaying a *low* level of involvement. Those who answered "yes" to two or more of the questions were classified as having a *moderate* level of involvement, while those who had done all three were said to have a *high* level of involvement.

Child's grade level and age

- In the 1993 NHES, 42 percent of children in grades 3-5 had parents who were highly involved; 32 percent of the elementary students had parents who were moderately involved; and 26 percent had parents who showed low involvement.

- By contrast, among students in grades 6 through 12, 24 percent had highly involved parents; 33 percent had parents who were moderately involved, and 43 percent had parents who showed low involvement.

- The percentage of students whose parents were moderately or highly involved in school activities declined from 73 percent or more at ages 8-11, to 67 percent at age 12, 57 percent at age 13, and around 50 percent at ages 16 and above.

Family characteristics

- Parents with more education tended to be more involved in school activities.

- Higher income families are more likely to participate in school-related activities than are lower income families; however, parent education is a stronger predictive factor than income.

- Single-parent families and stepfamilies tended to be less involved than families in which both birth parents were at home.

- Working mothers were generally as active as mothers who were full-time homemakers, but those who worked part-time were more active than those who worked full-time.

Public and private schools

- Among students in private schools, 54 percent had parents who were highly involved in school activities, whereas among public school students, only 22 percent had parents who were similarly involved. The percentage at least moderately involved was 84 percent for private school parents and 55 percent for public school parents.

Relationship to student achievement and behavior

- Students whose parents showed low school involvement were twice as likely to have repeated a grade (25 percent versus 11 percent) and three times as likely to have been suspended or expelled from school (21 percent versus 7 percent) as students with highly involved parents.

- Student participation in school-related activities, such as sports teams, bands or chorus, school clubs, or student government, was 91 percent among students with highly involved parents; 80 percent among students with moderately involved parents; and 51 percent among those whose parents showed low involvement.

- Participation in activities outside of school was 79 percent among students with parents who were highly involved; 64 percent among students with moderately involved parents; and 42 percent among students whose parents showed low involvement.

- Parent involvement was related to student outcomes even when factors like parent education, income, and race were controlled.

The Reports of Teachers, Parents, and Students on School Environment

In the 1990-91 academic year, elementary and secondary teachers were surveyed on the learning environments at their schools with a particular emphasis on safety (FRSS 42). Their reports can be compared with those of parents of students in grades 6 through 12 and those of students in grades 6 through 12 who were surveyed in 1993 (NHES:93) in three broad areas, student misbehavior, student disruptive behavior, and the impact of alcohol or drugs at school.

Interference with Teaching and Learning

- A substantial minority of teachers, 44 percent, reported that student misbehavior, which included talking in class, disrespect, cutting class, etc., interfered with their teaching. About one-third said that disruptive behavior on the part of their students, that is, serious and/or unlawful behavior, interfered with their teaching.

- Teachers were much more likely to view student misbehavior as a problem that interferes with their teaching than were parents to view it as a problem interfering with their children's ability to learn.

- Similarly, a greater percentage of teachers than parents reported that disruptive behavior on the part of students was a problem for the learning environment.

- Only a small minority of teachers and parents reported student alcohol or drug use interfered with teaching or learning. Teachers reported on alcohol and other drugs separately, and 5 percent rated each as a serious or moderate problem. Parents were asked about both kinds of substance together, and 4 percent indicated that student use of these substances interfered with their children's ability to learn.

Unlawful Behavior at School

- Teachers were asked whether physical conflicts among students, student possession of weapons, and sale of drugs on school grounds were problems in their schools. Twenty- eight percent reported that physical attacks were a serious or moderate problem, 5 percent reported that students carrying weapons were a serious or moderate problem, and 6 percent that the sale of drugs on school grounds was a serious or moderate problem.

- Parents and students were asked whether they had knowledge of physical attacks at school, students bringing weapons to school, or drugs being sold on or in sight of school property. Approximately one-quarter of parents had knowledge of physical attacks or weapons at school, and 15 percent reported knowing about drug dealing at or near school. Students were more likely than parents or teachers to report knowing about physical attacks or other students bringing weapons to school; approximately 40 percent reported knowing about both types of incident.

- Only 3 percent of students in 6th through 12th grade said that they had brought some type of weapon to school to protect themselves.

- Teachers were less likely than both parents and students to report the sale of drugs at school.

- Students attending middle/junior high schools and senior high schools were more likely than 6th through 12th grade students attending elementary schools[1] to report that they knew about physical attacks at their school.

- Nearly half of students attending senior high schools reported that other students at their schools brought weapons to school. The percentage was significantly different from the percentage of students attending schools of other grade levels.

- Senior high school students were also at least two times more likely than others to report drug dealing at their schools.

- Approximately double the percentage of students attending public schools reported each of the three types of unsafe incident than did students attending private schools.

---

[1] Schools were categorized according to the highest and the lowest grade taught at the school. Elementary schools are those in which the lowest grade is 3 or less and the highest grade is 8 or less. Middle or junior high schools have a lowest grade of 4 through 9 and a highest grade of 4 through 9. Senior high schools have a lowest grade of 7 through 12 and a highest grade of 10 through 12. Schools with lowest and highest grades that did not fit into these categories are categorized as "other combination."

- Physical attacks, weapons, and the sale of drugs were reported by a greater percentage of students attending large schools than those at smaller schools.

Harm or Harassment at School

- Students also reported on incidents of bullying, a type of incident that students who participated in qualitative research for the NHES:93 claimed to be a substantial source of concern for them, and on robbery, the taking of something from a student by force or threat of force. Bullying was the most common incident to be reported by 6th through 12th grade students; robbery at school was relatively rare.

- When these types of incident are considered together, approximately 70 percent of students knew about harm or harassment at school, and about half had witnessed one or more types of incident.

- Somewhat surprisingly, only about one-quarter of students reported worrying about being bullied, attacked, or robbed.

- Twelve percent of students, or one out of eight, said they had been personally and directly victimized at school.

- Students attending public schools were more likely to know about harm or harassment at school, to have witnessed incidents, to fear becoming victims, and to have been victimized than were students attending private schools.

Strategies to Avoid Harm at School

Students were asked whether they took steps to avoid trouble at school or on the way to or from school. The strategies included taking a special route to get to school, staying away from certain places in the school or on the school grounds, staying away from school-related events during the day, staying in a group while at school, and staying home from school.

- The most common strategy was to stay in a group while at school, employed by about 40 percent of students.

- Few students reported taking a special route to get to school (5 percent), skipping school (7 percent), or staying away from school-related events (8 percent). More common was to stay away from certain places in the school, reported by 20 percent of students, and to stay away from places on the school grounds, reported by 14 percent.

- When the six strategies to avoid harm are considered as a whole, however, about half of 6th through 12th grade students say they do not do any of these things to avoid trouble at school.

- Of those students who said they use strategies to avoid harm or harassment at school, most use more than one. About one-student in five reported staying in a group as the only strategy employed, and 5 percent reported only using one of the other strategies.

School Discipline Policies

Schools are responding to concerns about the behavior of students. One way is by formulating and disseminating a written school discipline policy.

- Ninety-five percent of both teachers and parents reported that their schools have a written discipline policy.

- In 1990-91, about 80 percent of teachers said their school discipline policy addressed alcohol and drugs; in 1993, 90 percent of parents said the discipline policy at their child's school covered those substances.

- Students typically agreed with positive statements about their school discipline policy. About 80 percent or more agreed or strongly agreed with the following statements: everyone knows the school rules (90 percent), the school rules are fair (80 percent), the punishment for breaking school rules is the same no matter who you are (80 percent), the school rules are strictly enforced (81 percent), and students know the penalty for breaking school rules (83 percent).

- Only 13 percent of students reported that their school discipline policy includes spanking or paddling as a punishment for breaking rules.

- Senior high students were less favorable in their assessment of certain aspects of school policy than were elementary or middle/junior high students. They were less likely to agree that their school rules were fair, that the punishment is the same for everyone, and that the rules are strictly enforced.

- Public school students also had less favorable views than private school students regarding whether the punishment is the same for everyone and whether the rules are strictly enforced. They also were less likely to say that everyone in their school knows what the rules are.

Alcohol/drug Education

Another way that schools are working to improve the learning environment for their students is by providing alcohol and drug education programs for their students. The findings from the NHES:93 indicate that they are providing it in a variety of ways and that it has an impact on the attitudes of youth.

- About 80 percent of 6th through 12th grade students reported having participated in some type of alcohol/drug education program during the current school year. Since data were collected from January through April, more students may have received alcohol/drug education before the end of the school year.

- More than half of students reported participation in more than one class or activity that provided alcohol/drug education.

- Alcohol/drug education appears to have an impact on student acceptance of substance use. Students who reported receiving alcohol/drug education in the current year were less likely to say that their friends approved of using tobacco products, marijuana, or other drugs. There was no significant difference in peer approval for drinking alcohol, however.

- Students were also asked to report the main message about using alcohol that they heard in school alcohol/drug education programs. About 60 percent said that message is "do not drink and drive." About one-quarter of students said the main message is "do not drink."

- When the main message about alcohol is taken into consideration, variations in peer approval of alcohol emerge. Only 31 percent of students who remembered the main message "do not drink" said that their friends approve of drinking alcohol. Among other students, reports of peer approval of drinking alcohol were higher. Forty-nine percent of students who remembered "do not drink and drive" and 44 percent who recalled another main message about drinking said that their friends approve of drinking alcohol.

NCES contact for the Fast Response Survey System:

Judi Carpenter
(202) 219-1333

NCES contact for the National Household Education Survey:

Kathryn Chandler
(202) 219-1767

Reports released by NCES:

Teacher Survey on Safe, Disciplined, and Drug-Free Schools
(November 1991; NCES 91-091)

Public School Principal Survey on Safe, Disciplined, and Drug-Free Schools
(February 1992; NCES 92-007)

Public School District Survey on Safe, Disciplined, and Drug-Free Schools
(April 1992; NCES 92-008)

Parent and Student Perceptions of the Learning Environment at School
(September 1993; NCES 93-281)

Figure 1. Percentage of parents and students who thought it was all right for students to smoke or drink alcohol, U.S. students in grades 6-12, 1993

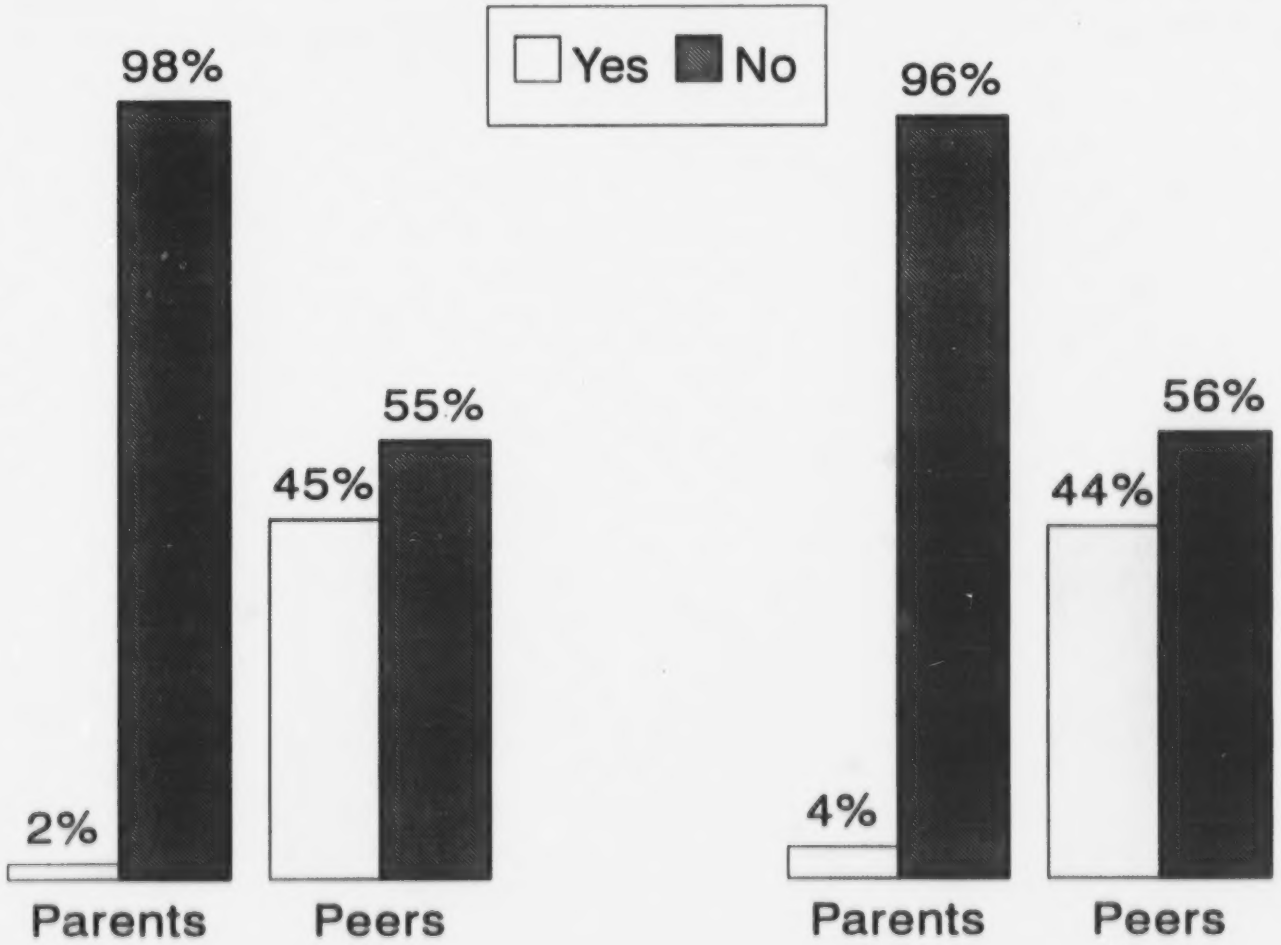


Figure 2. Percentage of students reporting peer approval of smoking and easy availability of cigarettes at school, by school grade level, U.S. students in grades 6-12, 1993

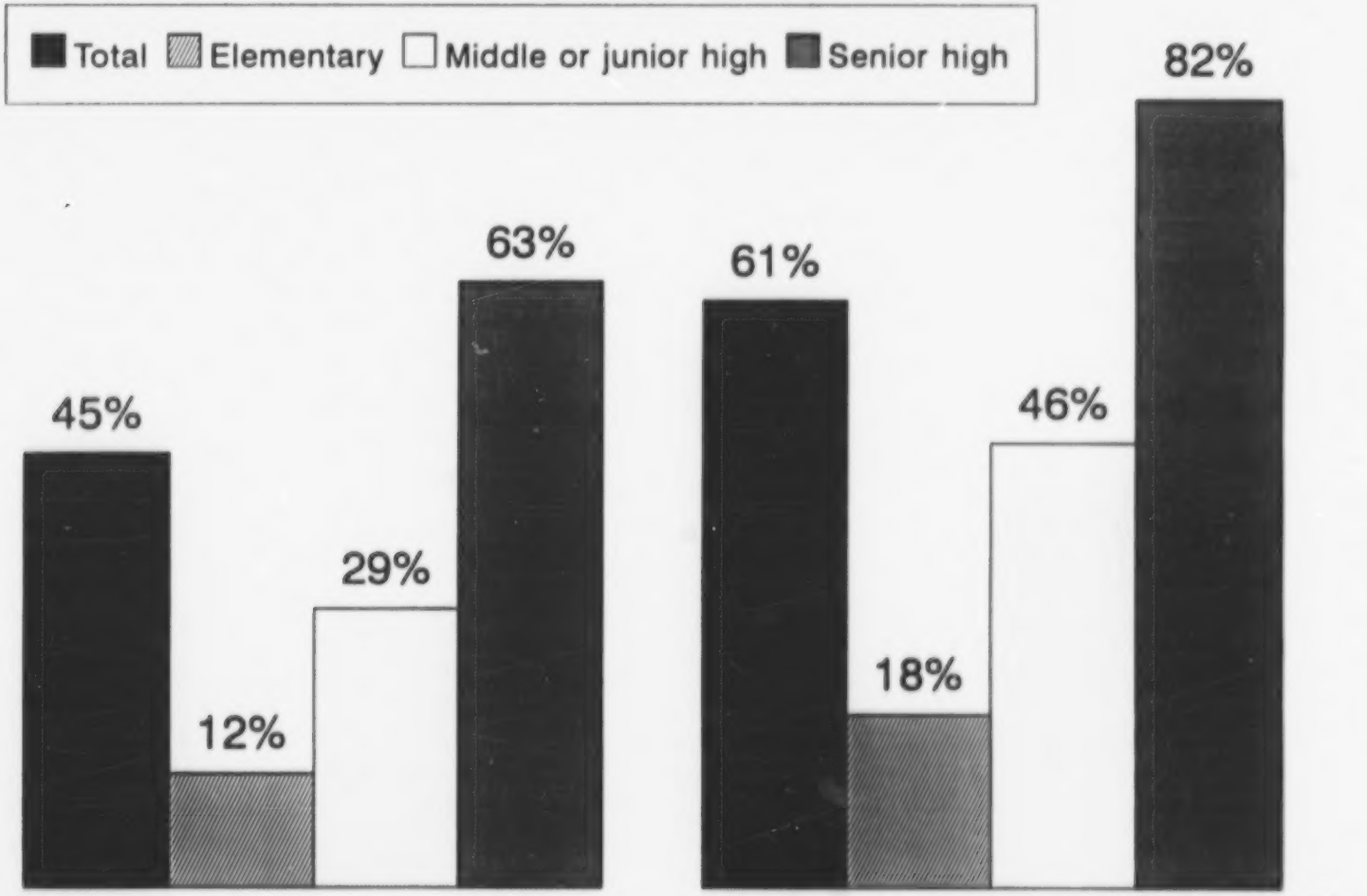


Figure 3. Percentage of students reporting peer approval of drinking alcohol and easy availability of alcohol at school, by school grade level, U.S. students in grades 6-12, 1993

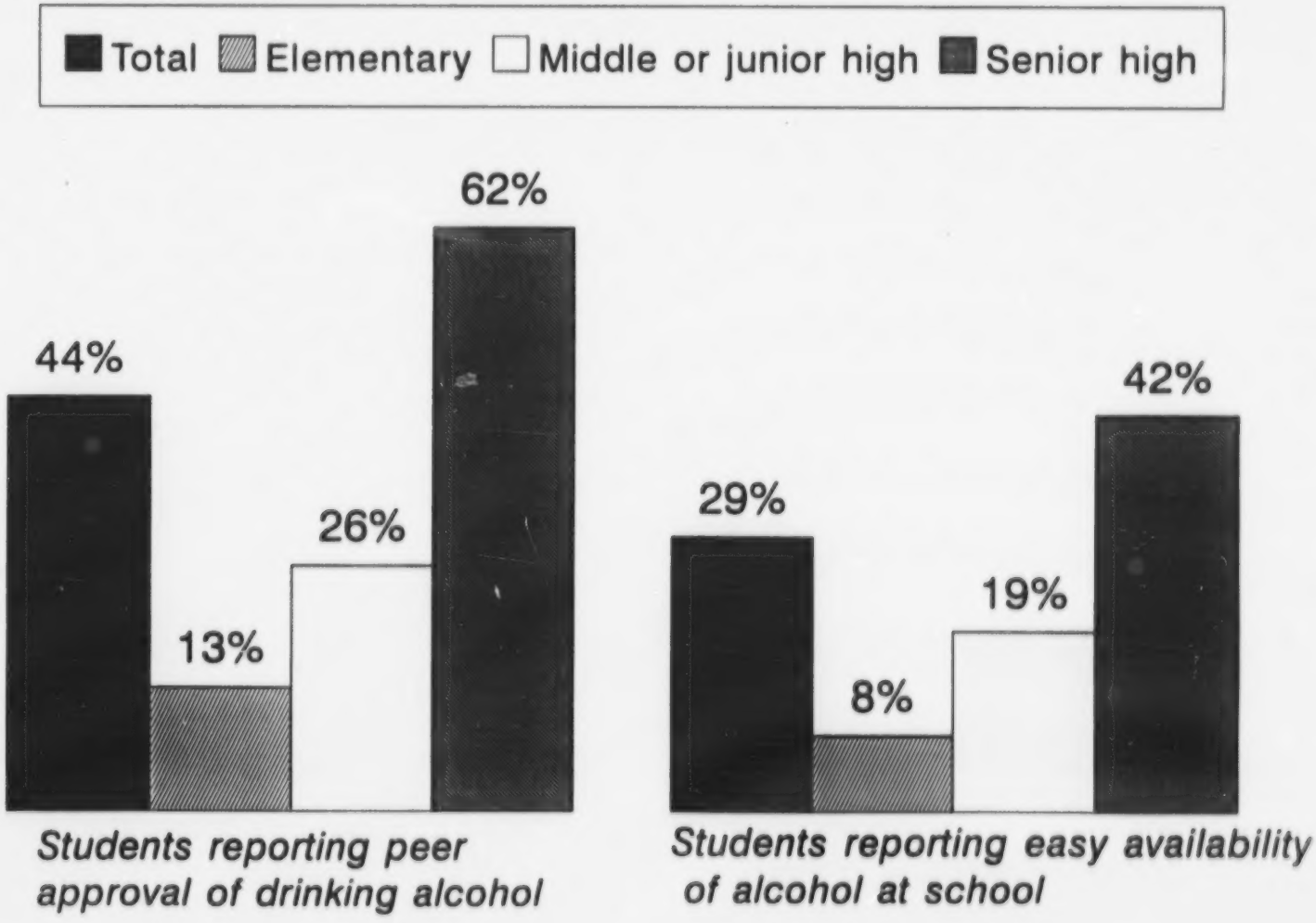


Figure 4. Percentage of students reporting peer approval and easy availabilty at school for cigarettes or alcohol, by school type, U.S. students in grades 6-12, 1993

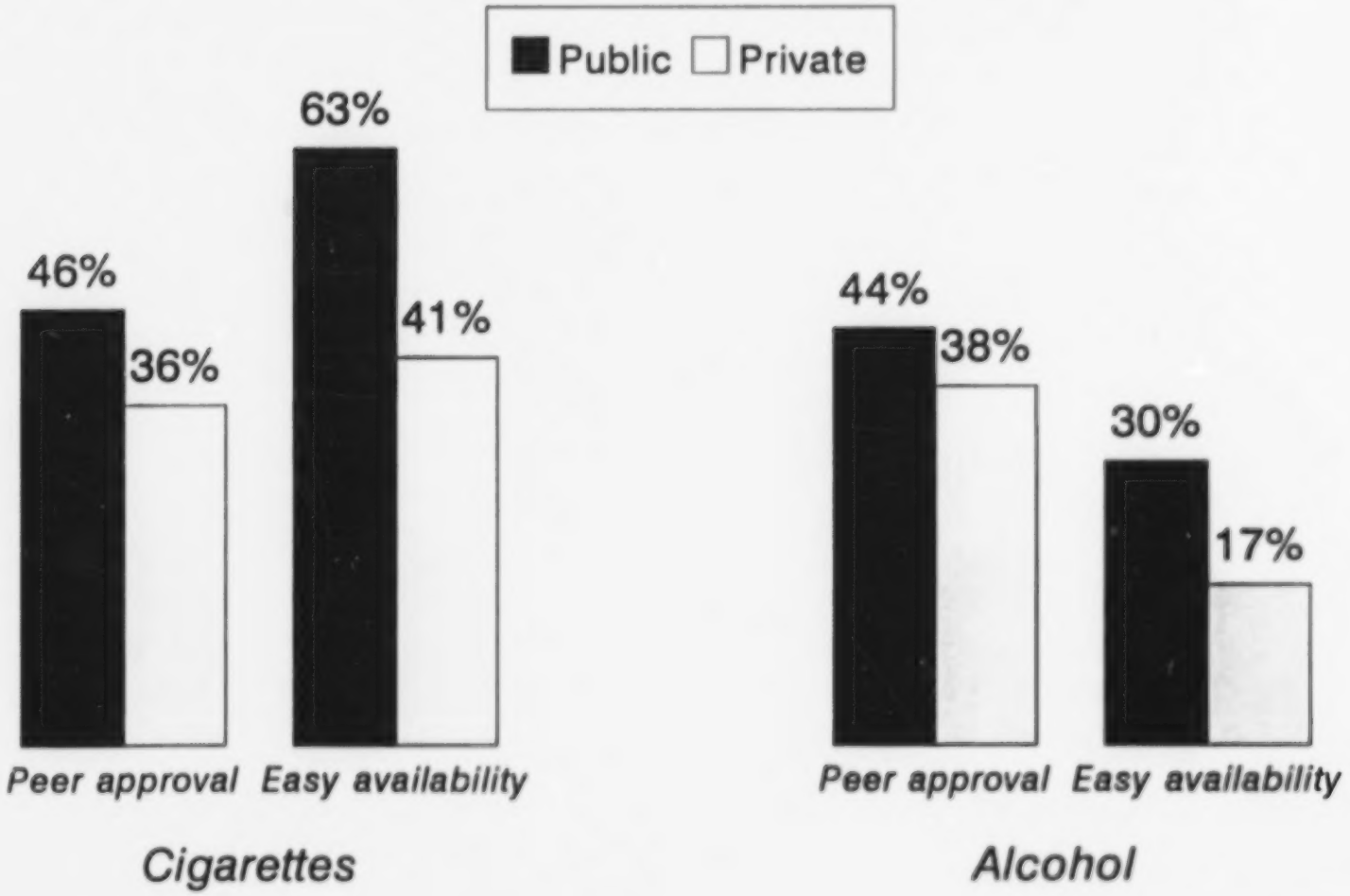


Figure 5. Parent expectations of educational attainment of their children compared with reality of attainment of U.S. adults aged 25-34 years, 1993

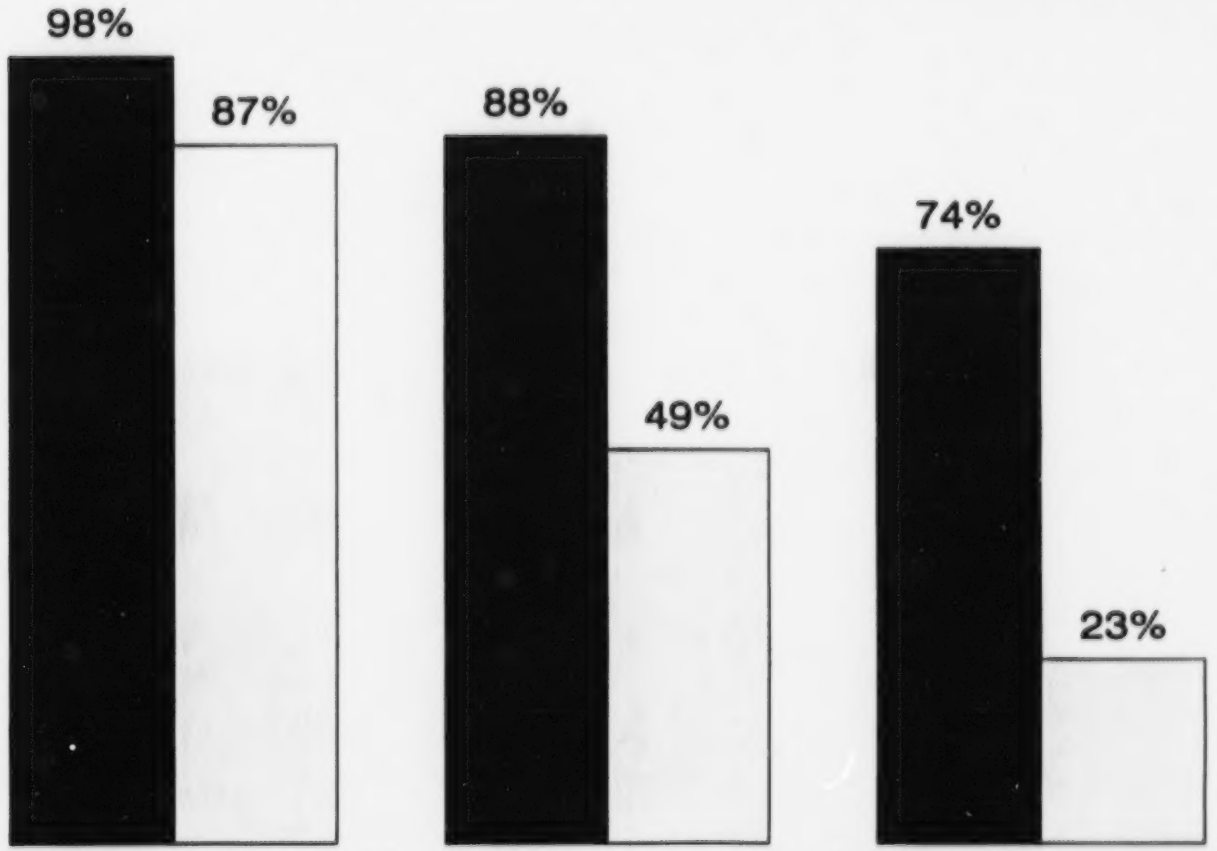


Figure 6. Percentage of students reporting peer approval of hard work and good behavior, by race/ethnicity, U.S. students in grades 6-12, 1993

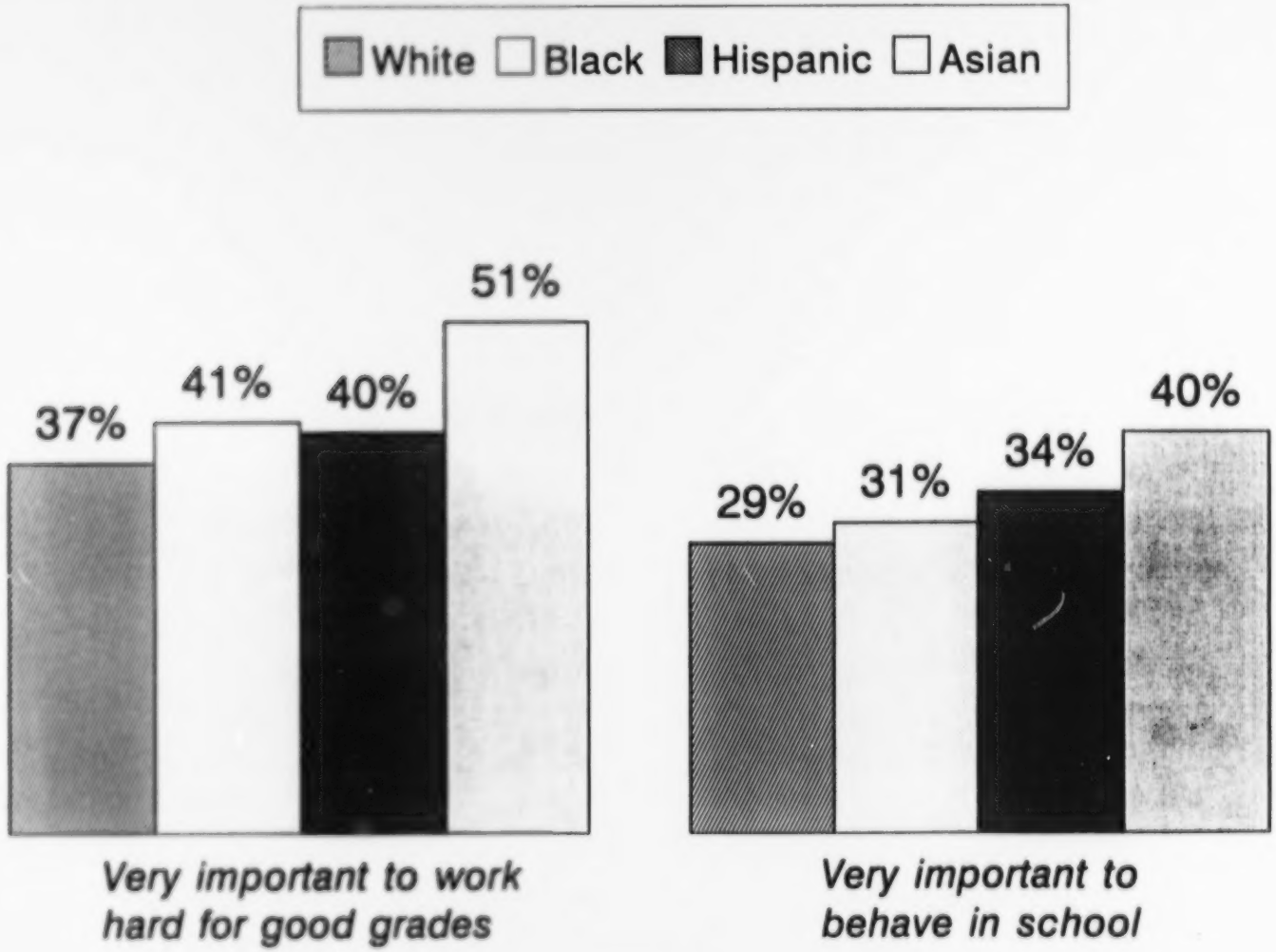


Figure 7. Percentage of students reporting peer approval of hard work and good behavior, and mutual respect at school, by school grade level, U.S. students in grades 6-12, 1993

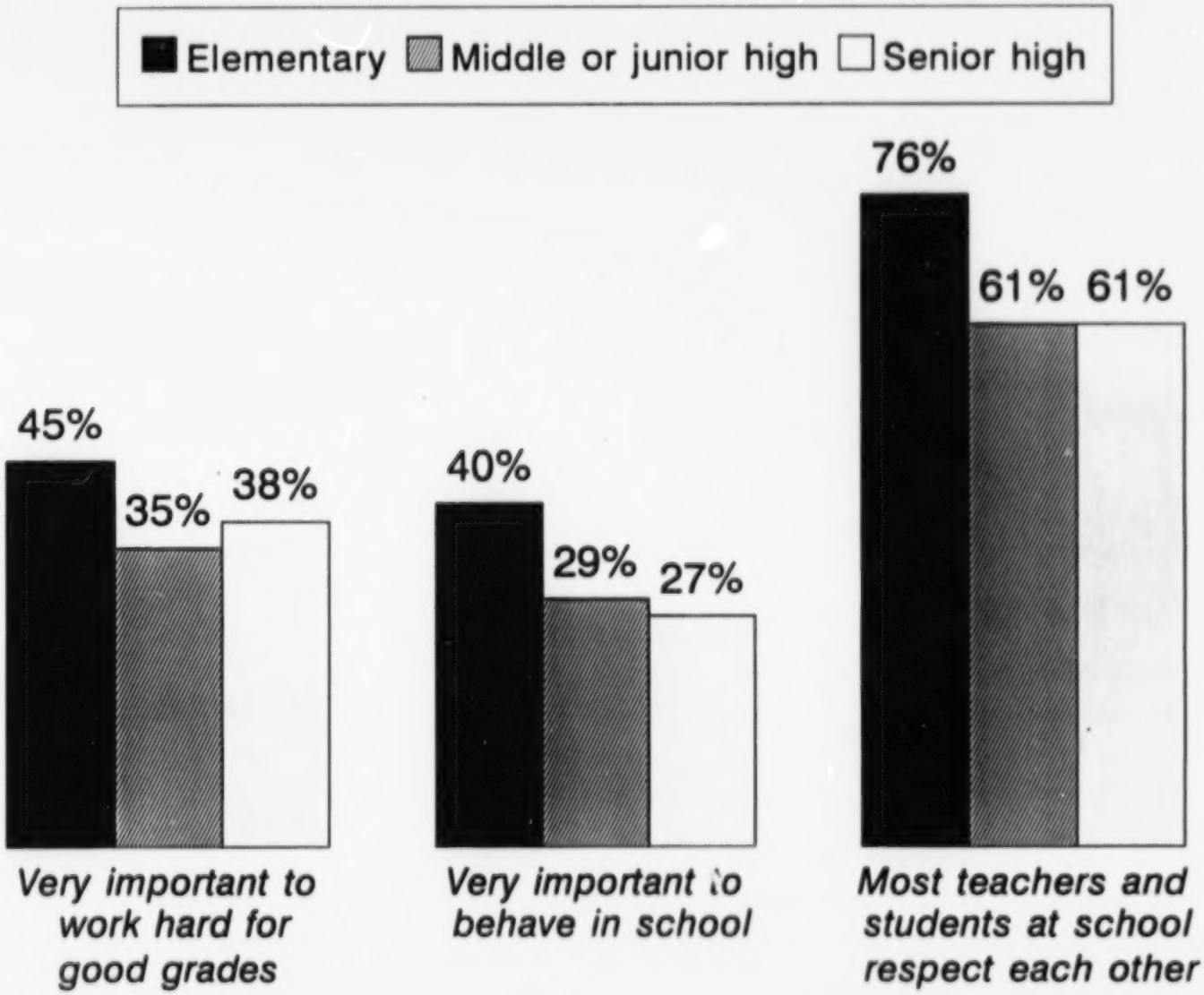


Figure 8. Percentage of students reporting peer approval of hard work and good behavior, and mutual respect at school, by school type, U.S. students in grades 6-12, 1993

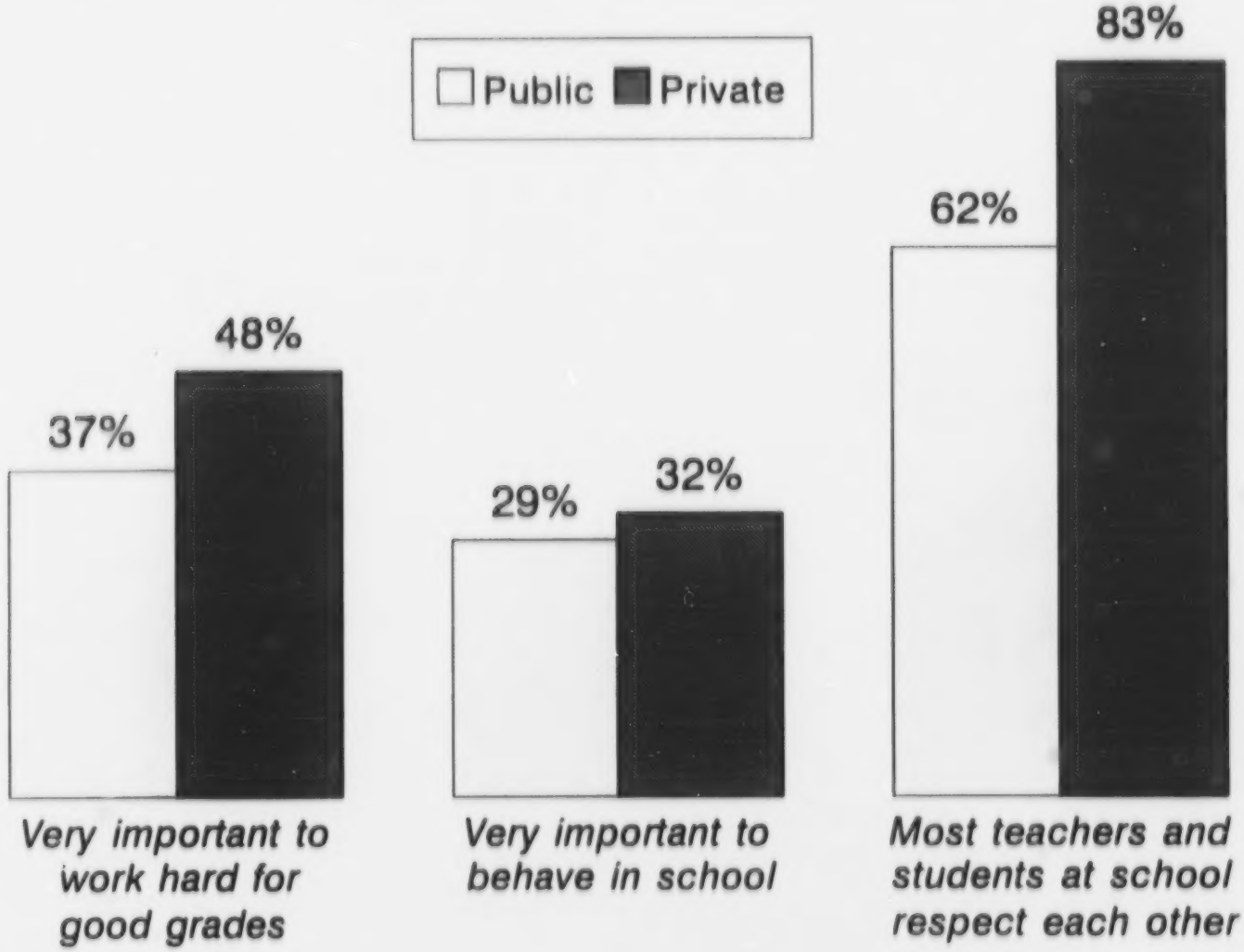
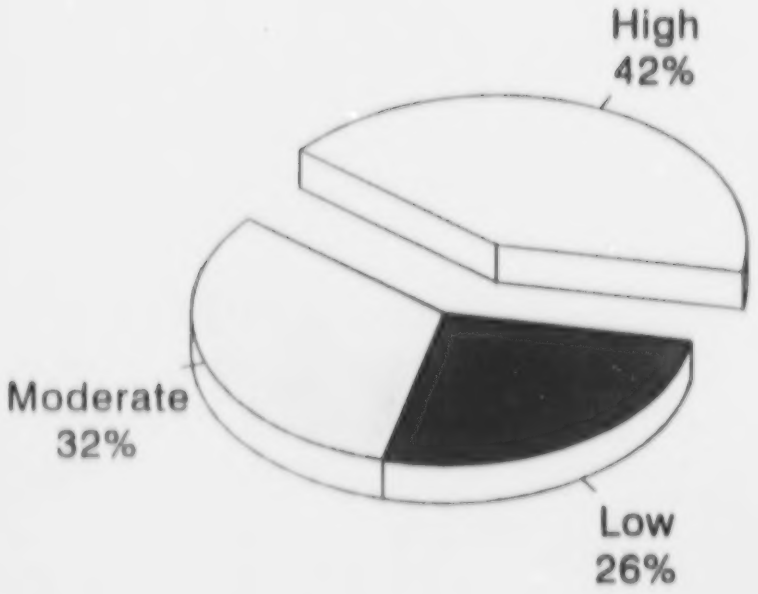
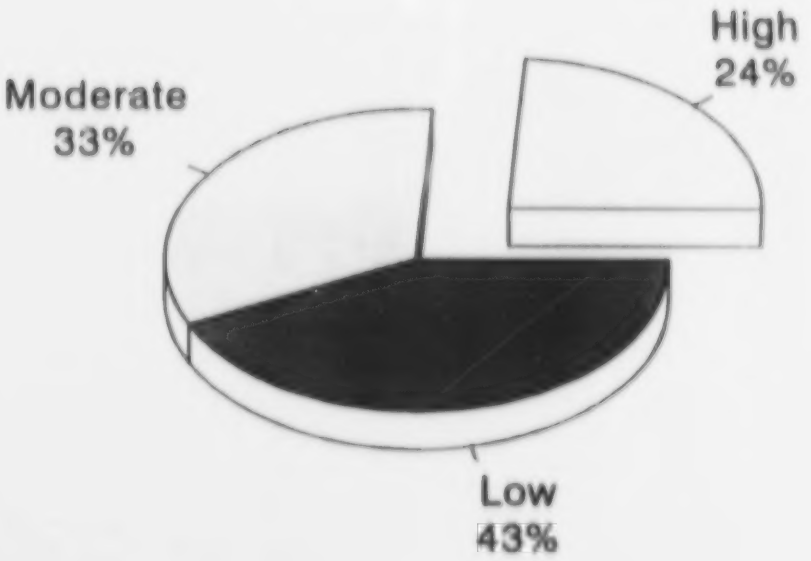


Figure 9. Level of parent involvement in school activities for U.S. students in grades 3-5 and 6-12, 1993



Students in grades 3-5



Students in grades 6-12

Figure 10. Percentage of U.S. students in grades 3-12 whose parents report moderate or high involvement in school activities, by age of child, 1993

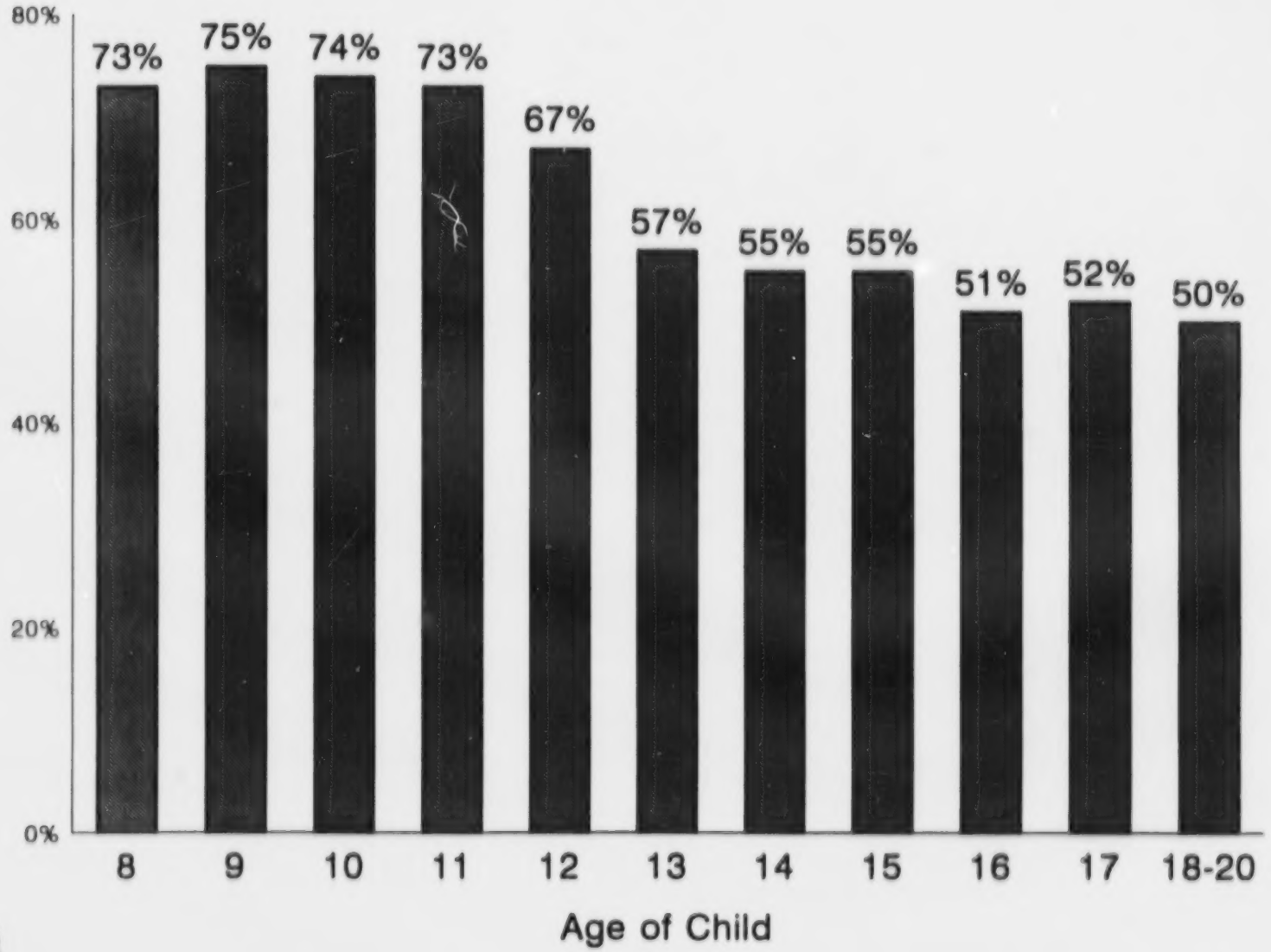
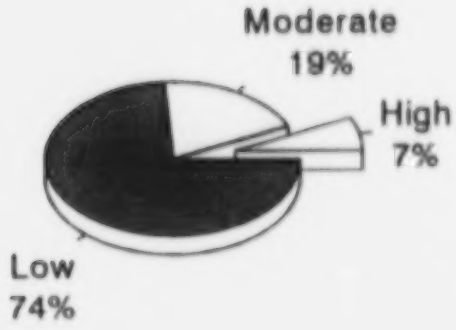
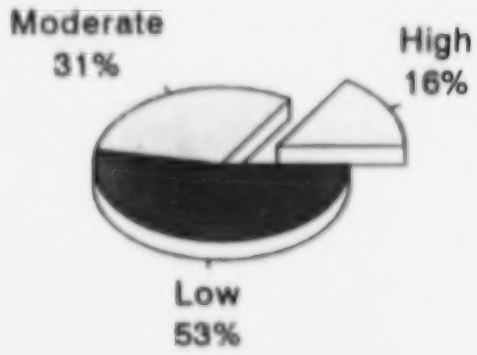


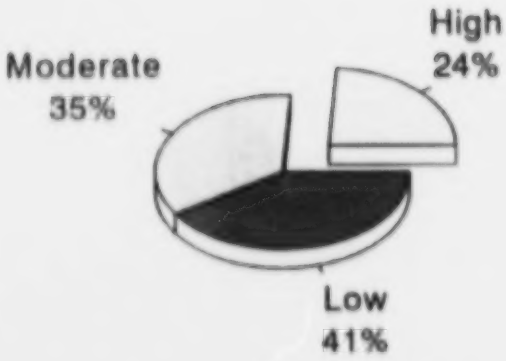
Figure 11. Level of parent involvement in school activities by parent education level, U.S. students in grades 6-12, 1993



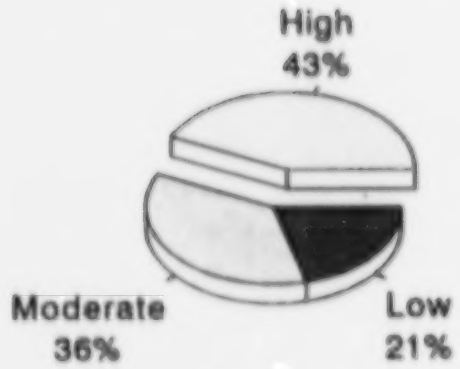
Less than high school



High school graduate

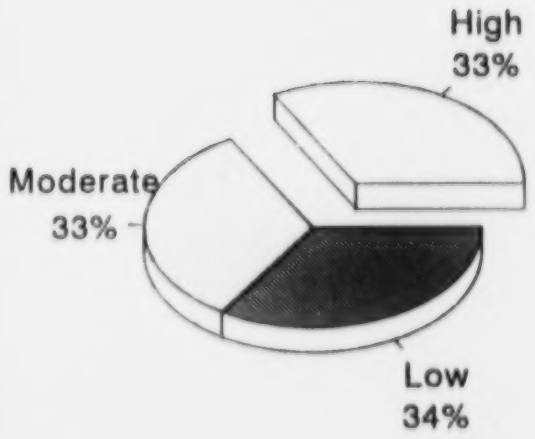


Some college

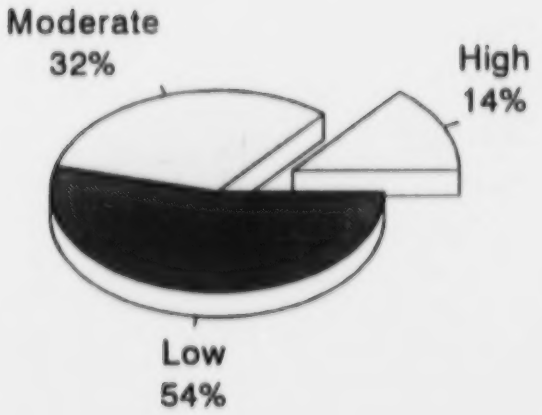


College grad or more

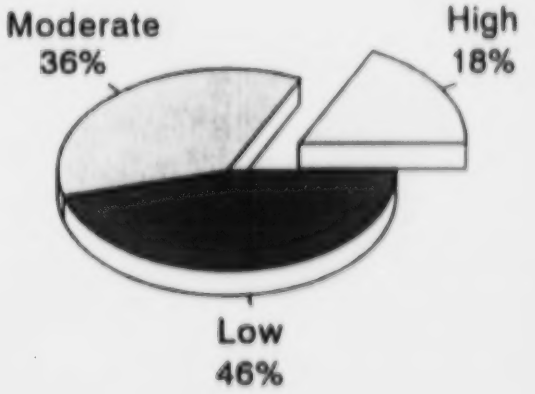
Figure 12. Level of parent involvement in school activities by family type, U.S. students in grades 6-12, 1993



Mother-Father families

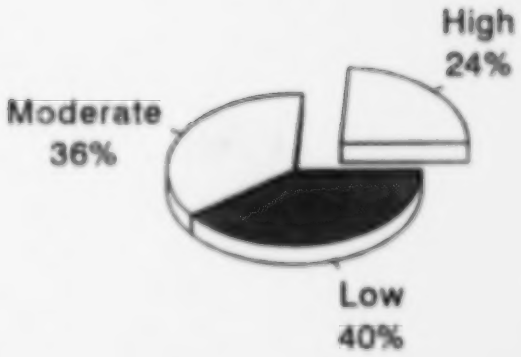


Mother-only families

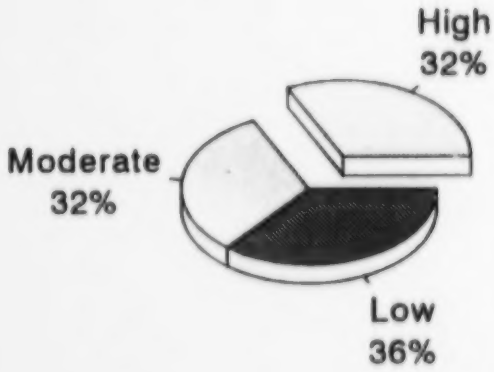


Mother-Stepfather families

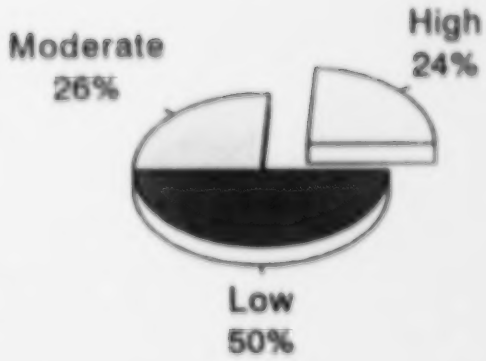
Figure 13. Level of parent involvement in school activities by mother's employment, U.S. students in grades 6-12, 1993



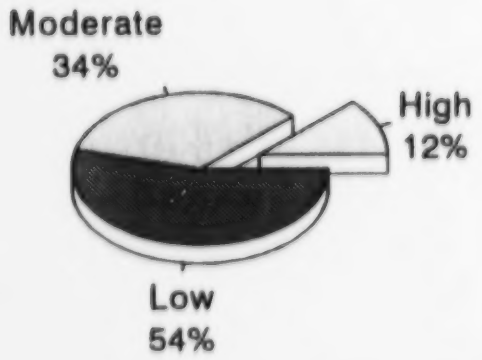
Mother works full-time



Mother works part-time

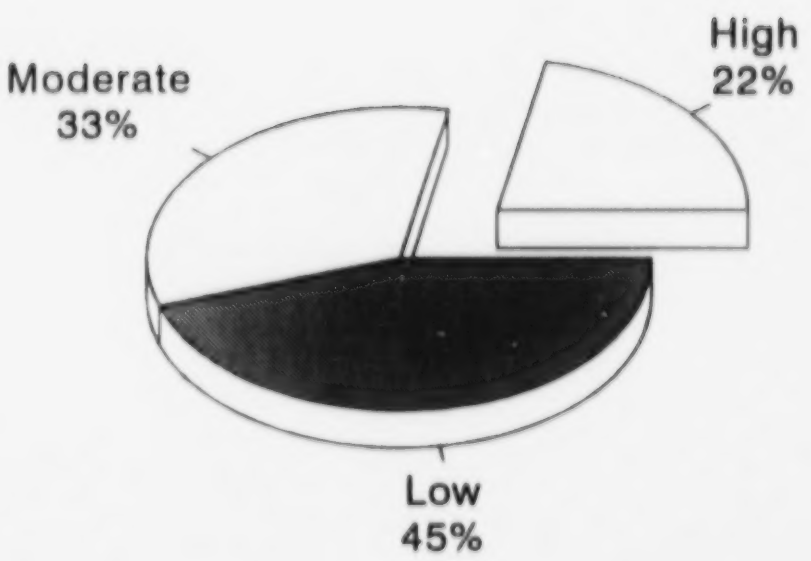


Mother not in labor force

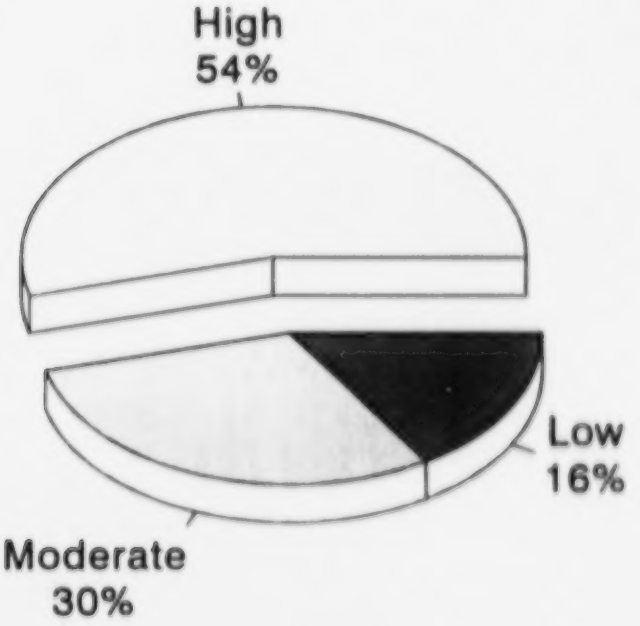


Mother looking for work

Figure 14. Level of parent involvement in school activities by school type, U.S. students in grades 6-12, 1993



Public



Private

Figure 15. Percentage of children experiencing problems in school, by level of parent involvement, U.S. students in grades 6-12, 1993

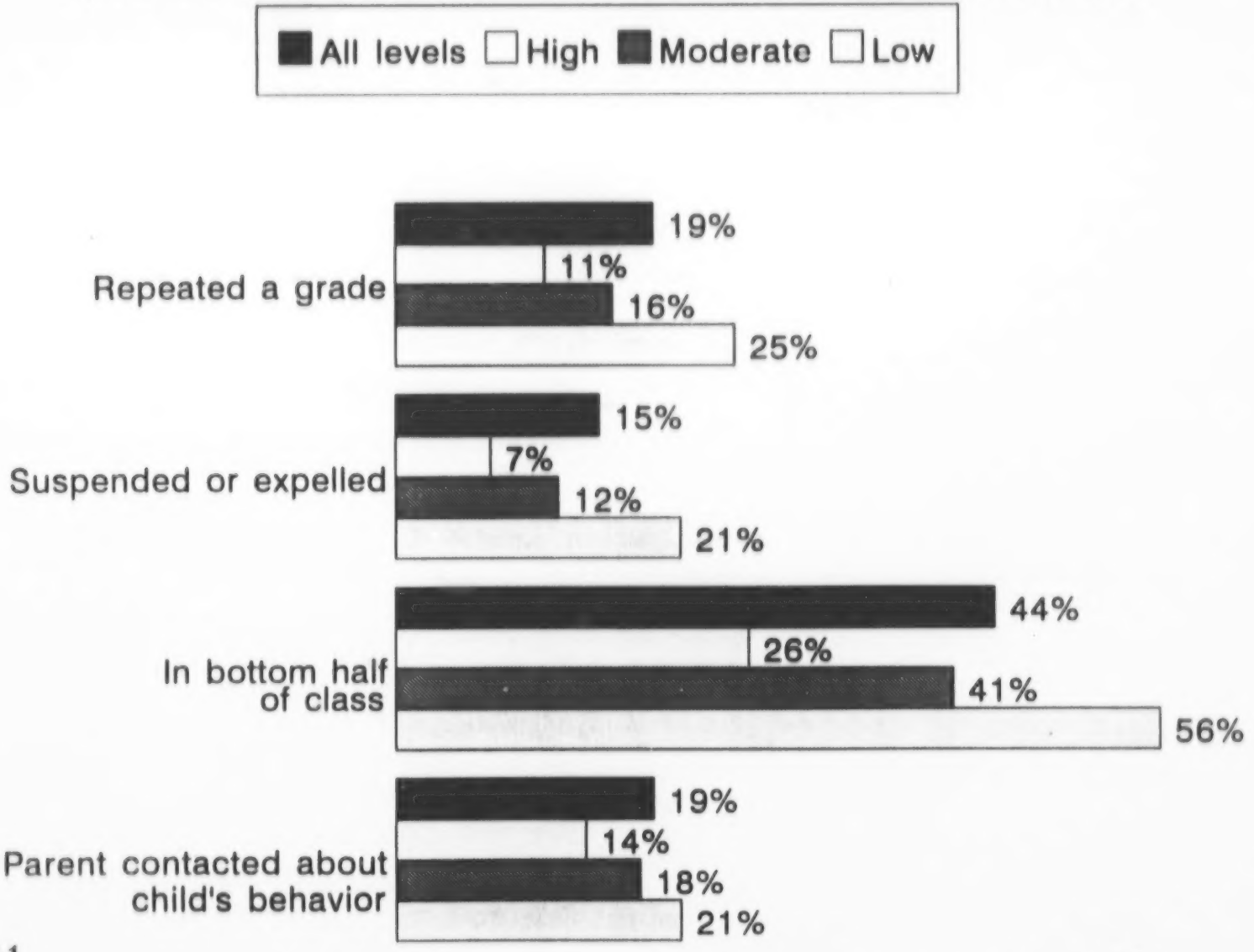


Figure 16. Percentage of children participating in group activities, by level of parent involvement, U.S. students in grades 6-12, 1993